

# Do You Have What It Takes to Stop Bullies?

## IT'S EASIER THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

**F**ourteen-year-old Jonna Herbstreit had seen it happen many times. Her classmate—we'll call her Allison—was being harassed at her Minnesota school. Kids would bash into Allison in the halls and call her horrible names. In the lunchroom, they pushed her chair so she fell to the ground.

What could Jonna do?

Here's what most kids do when they see someone being bullied: nothing.

over her friends. He's the boy who, looking for attention, builds a mean comedy routine around a quiet kid in science class. These bullies inflict pain on hearts and souls, not flesh and bone.

YOU—the bystander—have the ability to stop them, or at least take away some of their power. "The bystander is the most important

player in a bullying situation," says Kim Storey, a bullying-prevention expert from the Education

Development Center.

"The bystander has the power to step in and change things."

How?

Surprisingly, antibullying actions don't have to be dramatic to be effective. Small steps go far. Most bullies

**Jonna Herbstreit:**  
a bystander who  
gets involved



### Small Steps

Ninety percent of all bullying is witnessed by other kids. Seventy-five percent of those witnesses do nothing. When a bully is violent, the decision to steer clear is usually the right one. Get help immediately. Find an adult. But don't risk your own safety by intervening.

The typical bully, however, isn't violent: She's the loud and bossy girl who lords



KENESHA ALWAYS TAKES IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

INSET: COURTESY OF HERBSTREIT FAMILY; CARTOON: ROBERT MATSON

love an audience—friends who laugh along as they call out a rude name or “like” an embarrassing Facebook post. By simply walking away or deleting a comment, you are sending the message that you don’t approve of the bully’s “performance.”

On the other hand, if you stay silent or do nothing, you might be sending the message to the bully that you approve—even if you don’t. Often it takes just one brave soul to send a signal of disapproval and others will follow along.

Another way to help: Show some kindness to the victim, even if he or she isn’t your friend. That’s what Jonna did. Each day, she made a point to walk with Allison from class to class. With Jonna at Allison’s side, the tormenters laid off. And as Jonna points out, “A lot of times, exclusion is the worst part of bullying. Can you imagine going to school and nobody even says ‘hi’ to you all day?”

## You Have Power

Many antibullying programs stress the importance of engaging an adult if you witness someone being bullied—or are bullied yourself. This can certainly help. Still, some kids simply don’t want to get involved. They think it’s none of their business, or they fear being targeted themselves if they step in.

But experts agree: You have more power than you think when it comes to stopping the bullies—if you’re willing to use it.

Will you step up? ●

# What Do You Think?

## Should you step up when you witness bullying?

Use evidence from the article AND your own ideas to support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.



## YES

IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO!

1 As a bystander,  
I have a lot of  
power to help.

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

## NO

I'VE GOT MY OWN PROBLEMS.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

**EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES.** Decide what you think. Will you step up the next time you witness bullying? Why or why not? State your answer in one sentence below. This can become a thesis statement for an essay on this topic.

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